

**National Cooperative College Graduation Ceremony on Thursday 18 August
at 14:30 at the National Cooperative College, Bois Marchand, Terre Rouge**

**Honourable Soomilduth Bholah, Minister of Industrial Development,
SMEs and Cooperatives**

**Mrs. Chandanee Jhowry Permanent Secretary of the Ministry Industrial
Development, SMEs and Cooperatives**

**Mr. Hurrydeo Boodhoo Chairman of the Council of National Co-operative
College**

Mr. Sanjeev Coonjobeeharry Director of National Co-operative College

Council members of the National Cooperative College

Graduands and family members

All protocols observed

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon.

I feel honoured and privileged to have been asked to be the chief guest and to join you for the first Graduation Ceremony of the National Co-operative College.

Cooperatives flourish and develop better only with adequate recognition and attention by the government. The Government of Mauritius stands ready to work with all stakeholders to take the cooperative movement forward. It has always offered fiscal and non-fiscal measures to enable cooperative societies and SMEs to thrive.

The Government recognises that capacity building, training and education remain critical for co-operative development, and strengthening networks is crucial. Over the recent years, it has provided the necessary structure with the ideal conducive productive environment.

Another landmark initiative is the establishment of the National Cooperative College which was inaugurated in August 2018.

This institution, a first of its kind in Mauritius and perhaps in the region has as mandate the promotion and development of cooperative entrepreneurship, philosophy, principles and values through education and training.

I am happy that the college has concentrated largely on Cooperative Management and Cooperative Business Management programs. And today we are celebrating the first cohort of Diploma in Cooperative Business Management.

I urge the NCC to maintain the training of professional programs that do not turn your graduands into job seekers but train them to be cooperative entrepreneurs.

One of the key commitments of government is to unlock the potential of SMEs and cooperatives, as vehicles that can lead to the achievement of inclusive economic growth.

At a time when income inequality is rising around the world, it is good to remember that solutions for inequality exist. The co-operative model is foremost among these. Its internationally agreed definition, principles and values set it apart from all other forms of entrepreneurial organisations.

However, we must always bear in mind that the core principles in the co-operative sector should be transparency, accountability, leadership, co-operation and high ethical behaviour. Financial scandals can put pressure on the movement and it will take time to win back public confidence in co-operatives.

The co-operative movement in Mauritius is more than a century old. This sector has, during those years, considerably contributed to the socioeconomic progress of the country. The sector is now called upon to play a key role to boost the post-Covid 19 economy of Mauritius.

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic has put great stress on every human individual, and the whole social, economic, and political fabric; locally, nationally, and globally. But whilst it affects all people and all societies, it does so more profoundly and painfully for the most vulnerable, for poor people, and communities.

With the spread of the COVID-19 and its economic and social impacts, the world has faced a time of unprecedented uncertainty. It is a time when things that were previously unimaginable are now a reality. As is the case with every crisis, ironically, it is also a challenge and it also produces opportunities. Individual cooperatives and the cooperative movement as a whole have reacted in that sense.

The pandemic has been dealt with through a collective effort. **Let us not forget that when “I” is replaced by “we”, even “illness” becomes “wellness”.**

To the graduands, I want to say that Graduation Day is a special day in the life of any student; it is the crowning moment of all the hard work, frustrations and anxieties endured while following this course.

I congratulate you for finishing the course and marking the history of Mauritius with you being the first batch of Graduands from the National Co-operative College.

This event is important not only for your accomplishments, but also for the country since the consolidation of the professional capacities is the key elements for the continuation and sustainability of the cooperative movement in Mauritius. You testify today that you have decided to carry a large responsibility on your shoulders to move the cooperative sector a step ahead.

I shall conclude by commending the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives for its achievements to date. Our co-operative business model has proven to be a successful, enduring and sustainable one. I am sure this will only continue and develop further in the years ahead, enhancing its capacity to contribute to economic and social well-being.

I congratulate the National Cooperative College for its first batch of Diplomates in Cooperative Business Management and wish the management best of luck for other courses.

Thank you for your attention.